A

TOKEN OF REGARD

TO THE

MEMBERS

OF THE

ESTABLISHED CHURCH AT STIRLING,

IN A

LETTER,

ADDRESSED TO THEM,

By their late Paſtor,

WILLIAM INNES.

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To the CONGREGATION *of the* ESTABLISHED CHURCH *at* STIRLING.

MY DEAR FRIENDS,

BEFORE I left Stirling, I had propoſed to myſelf a new plan of parochial viſitation. The common way, you know, of engaging in this duty is ſeparately to viſit each family, and either to addreſs to them a general exhortation on the importance of attending to their ſpiritual intereſts, or more particularly to enforce the relative duties which the different members of it owe to one another. Such an exerciſe has, in many inſtances, I am perſuaded, been exceedingly uſeful: It is attended, however, with ſome inconveniences. If there is occaſion to adminiſter reproof to any particular member of the family, it cannot be done with ſuch advantage in the preſence of the reſt; or, where a miniſter is diſpoſed to enquire at the head of a family if the worſhip of God be maintained under his roof, or if he be diſcharging the various duties

he owes to his children and domeſtics, where the reſult of the enquiry is doubtful, it is plain, that the more privately it is made, ſo much the better. Should the anſwer be unfavourable, and if there be occaſion to exhort to the diſcharge of duties that have formerly been neglected, there would be a manifeſt impropriety in addreſſing a parent in the preſence of his children in the ſame way in which you might moſt properly ſpeak to him when alone. Human nature is ſuch,---we all feel it,---that we are diſpoſed to take in good part, either an admonition or a reproof, if addreſſed to us in private by one whom we have reaſon to conſider as a friend, which, if adminiſtered in a more public manner, would immediately call forth a ſpirit of ſelf-vindication, and fill us with diſguſt at the indelicacy of the perſon from whom we received it.

On this principle, it occurred to me, ſome time before I reſigned my charge as one of your miniſters, that it might be of conſiderable advantage to have at leaſt one ſerious converſation with every individual of the congregation, that I might faithfully warn him of his danger, if he was acting inconſiſtently with the Chriſtian character, and earneſtly admoniſh him to conſider well the foundation of his hope before God. I have now deeply to regret that I was ſo long of thinking of this particular plan of uſefulneſs. It was only on a

very limited ſcale I was able to proſecute it before I left Stirling. I once thought of reſiding during part of laſt winter among you, as my intended place of worſhip was not ready; and, though I could no longer addreſs you from the pulpit, to endeavour, by ſuch private intercourſe, to promote your ſpiritual improvement. Other engagements, however, have prevented me from having this in my power.

Although I have ſeen it my duty to leave the eſtabliſhed church, I truſt, my dear friends, none of you will aſcribe it to any want of affection for thoſe who were placed under my charge. The many marks of perſonal regard which I received while reſiding at Stirling, were in the higheſt degree calculated to attach me to my ſituation. I had an opportunity of forming friendſhips among you, which I truſt no change of place, nor of external circumſtances, ſhall ever be able to diſſolve; and, had I not been completely convinced, that, according to my views of the conſtitution of the eſtabliſhed church, as well as the manner in which its government is adminiſtered, I could not conſcientiouſly continue a miniſter of it, I ſhould have felt much more ſeverely at leaving a place with which I was connected by ſo many ties.

It is not my deſign here to enter upon a diſcuſſion of the grounds on which I left the eſtabliſhment. Suffice it to obſerve in general, that I have hitherto experienced the

fulleſt ſatisfaction in having taken ſuch a ſtep. I wiſh to direct your attention to ſome ſubjects which are equally intereſting to us all; and my ſole object in alluding to theſe circumſtances, is to explain the deſign of my thus addreſſing you.

I have reaſon to fear, there are not a few in the congregation who are living without any ſerious concern about an eternal world; who, though they may make a general profeſſion of Chriſtianity, are ſhewing, by their habitual neglect of ſome of its precepts, that they are not living by the faith of the Son of God. From the principles I was accuſtomed to explain and enforce while among you, I certainly believe every individual of this deſcription to be in a moſt deplorable ſituation. I ſhould be happy, were it ſtill in my power, to point out to ſuch, in converſation, the dreadful conſequences of continuing in ſuch a ſtate, and alſo to excite more conſiſtent profeſſors to increaſing ſtedfaſtneſs in the work of the Lord. But as we cannot now enjoy perſonal intercourſe, the object of this letter is, in ſome meaſure, to ſupply the want of it. To do this, then, as completely as poſſible, let us ſuppoſe that I were calling upon each of you as a friend, that I found you alone, and that you had leiſure for half an hour's converſation. After the common civilities were over, I ſhould probably addreſs you ſomewhat in the following manner.

"I am happy, my dear friend, that I have found you at leiſure to-day. I have often wiſhed to have a little private converſation with you upon the ſame intereſting ſubjects to which your attention is ſo frequently called from the pulpit. We are ſo apt to forget the importance of eternity in travelling through the preſent world, that the oftener we are put in mind of it ſo much the better. As I truſt then you are convinced, that in calling upon you at preſent, to converſe a little upon this ſubject, I can have no other object in view than the advancement of your beſt intereſts, I hope you will take in good part any thing I may ſuggeſt. When we come to die, we ſhall not regret, that we have been too faithful to one another, or that we have done too much to promote each others eternal happineſs.

You know very well, my dear friend, how common it is among us to make a profeſſion of Chriſtianity. But a mere profeſſion will be of no avail when we come to depart into the world of ſpirits. This ſolemn event lies before each of us; it is daily coming nearer. It certainly then becomes us very ſeriouſly to conſider how we ſhall meet it, and what the ſtate of our ſouls will be, when it actually arrives. We are all ready to acknowledge the importance of ſuch an enquiry; but, alas! we are too apt to reſt in ſuch a general acknowledgment, without bringing the queſtion cloſely home to ourſelves.

This is one inſtance, among many others, of the deep deceitfulneſs of the human heart ; and it is a great mercy when we are ſo fully convinced of this, as to ſee the abſolute neceſſity of watchfulneſs and prayer. Now, to aſſiſt you in guarding againſt its deceitful influence, I would wiſh you to aſk yourſelf the following queſtions : "Have I ever ſeriouſly conſidered that I have a ſoul that ſhall never die, but is ordained, by the irrevocable decree of Heaven, to exiſt in a ſtate of happineſs or of miſery for ever ? Have I ever enquired which of theſe two ſtates I have reaſon to think will be mine, when my cold head is laid in the duſt ?" Now, think, ſo far as you can recollect, if you ever ſeriouſly engaged in ſuch an enquiry. -- --- --- --- --- --- --- --- ---
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If you are conſcious you never have, let me entreat of you to do it now. You muſt be ſenſible of the unſpeakable danger of delaying to do ſo ; and while the word of God ſo clearly points out the infinite importance of the ſubject, it is eaſy to ſee how completely inexcuſable we ſhall all be found at laſt, if we have lived and died in the neglect of it.

The time we ſpend in this world you know is peculiarly intereſting. It is our ſtate on earth that is to fix our ſtate through eternity. We have much reaſon to bleſs God that he hath given us his word, and that in it he hath ſo clearly revealed the evil of ſin, and its dreadful

conſequences, as well as the way in which we may be delivered, both from the one and the other. Theſe ſubjects you often hear explained from the pulpit. But here again there is a danger of ſubſtituting a general acquieſcence in the doctrines of ſcripture, in the room of a perſonal application of the truth. As we are naturally apt to do ſo, perhaps converſing a little about it may be uſeful to us both.

Now, moſt of men, you know, profeſs to be convinced that they are ſinners, and that ſin expoſes them to miſery. But there is a material difference between making this acknowledgment, and a man ſeriouſly conſidering himſelf as a poor guilty creature before God, and actually expoſed, on account of ſin, to his righteous diſpleaſure. Perhaps you think, ſo far as you know yourſelf, you are convinced of this truth. I ſhall mention then a teſt, which I have often found exceedingly uſeful in aſſiſting one to aſcertain this point. When a man begins ſeriouſly to conſider that he has ſinned againſt a Being of infinite goodneſs, nay, that he has, in innumerable inſtances, violated the law of that God, who, both from the perfect excellence of his character, and the multiplied tokens of his loving kindneſs, is entitled to his ſupreme affection and unreſerved obedience, he begins to ſee a criminality and an ingratitude in ſin of every kind, which he never diſcovered before. He feels a ſecret deteſtation of this

ingratitude, and of himſelf, for having been chargeable with it. He is filled with contrition on account of it, and, laying aſide thoſe vain excuſes he was formerly perhaps diſpoſed to plead, he not only, without reſerve, acknowledges his guilt, but experiences a ſpirit of ſelf-condemnation in the preſence of God.

Beſides, when a man is convinced, that he is expoſed to imminent danger, he muſt feel an uneaſineſs, which nothing can remove but the diſcovery of a way in which he may eſcape. Conſider this a little. I think you muſt ſee, that this conſequence of a diſcovery of danger is quite unavoidable. Here then ſome other queſtions occur, which I would alſo wiſh you, with all poſſible ſerioufneſs, to bring home to your own mind.

Have I ever conſidered the guilt with which I am chargeable in the preſence of God, as well as the danger to which I am expoſed? Have I felt this concern about deliverance, and have I had recourſe to the method preſcribed in the word of God to obtain it? --- --- --- --- --- --- --- --- --- --- --- --- --- --- --- --- --- ---

If you have reaſon to fear that you never have, I would wiſh you to be exceedingly ſuſpicious of your preſent ſtate. The firſt part of the operation of the bleſſed Spirit upon the mind mentioned by our Lord, is, that he ſhall convince the world of ſin; and it may afford you comfort to recollect, that Jeſus, while on earth,

promiſed that the Father would give the Holy Spirit to them that aſk him. If you ſee the value of the promiſe, you will know how to improve it. But let it be habitually recollected, that it is only through the new and living way of the Redeemer's righteouſneſs we can have acceſs to the Father.

But perhaps you can recollect when you were thus convinced of ſin; when you began to ſee your character in a different light from that in which you had ſeen it before; when you felt this ſecret contrition on account of your iniquities; when you experienced this concern about deliverance, and found that nothing could quiet your troubled conſcience, but the application of that peace-ſpeaking blood which alone cleanſeth from all ſin. If this be the caſe, my dear friend, what reaſon have you to bleſs God for it! It is he alone that hath made you to differ; therefore give to him all the glory. You have believed the teſtimony of God concerning his Son. In this teſtimony we are aſſured, that Jeſus ſuffered, the juſt for the unjuſt, that he might bring us to God; that he gave his life a ranſom for many; that whoſoever believeth in him might not periſh but have everlaſting life. You muſt have ſeen a peculiar value in the goſpel of Chriſt. It muſt have appeared to you as indeed glad tidings of great joy. You muſt have diſcovered a diſtinguiſhed excellence and heavenly beauty in the perſon

and character of the great Immanuel. You muſt often have contemplated, with holy admiration and gratitude, the bright diſplay of all the attributes of the divine nature, in which they mingle their beams, and ſhine forth, in all the ſplendour of their united glory, in the wonderful plan of our redemption; while it is daily the ſource of your richeſt conſolation, that, out of the fulneſs that is in Jeſus, we are graciouſly promiſed the ſupply of every returning want.

But faith and obedience are neceſſarily connected. If we believe in the Lord Jeſus as our Saviour, we muſt love him; and if we love him, we muſt keep his commandments. If any man be in Chriſt, he is a new creature. He experiences a material change in his ſentiments and diſpoſitions, and the general tenor of his deportment is formed upon new principles. He knows that Chriſtianity is a ſpiritual religion; that it influences, not only the external conduct, but preſcribes the ſecret motives by which it is to be regulated. He knows that the Lord ſearcheth the heart, and that, while he ſees the ſecret ſpring of every action, and the ſtate of even our inmoſt thoughts, he expreſsly requires that in all things we ſhould have a ſingle eye to his glory. Under the lively impreſſion, that he is daily thinking and ſpeaking and acting in the preſence of this great Searcher of hearts, he is accuſtomed to look forward to the world to come, and to conſider how he will appear at laſt, when he ſtands before his tribunal.

Now, if this be the character of a Chriſtian, and if we really believe on the Son of God, we ſhall be concerned to have the teſtimony of our conſcience, that, ſo far as we can trace the ſecret principles from which we act, we deſire invariably to have a ſupreme regard to the divine glory. But if this be the caſe, we muſt take the word of God for our rule in all things. Whatever it prohibits we muſt avoid; whatever it commands we muſt obey. This univerſal regard to the revealed will of God is the grand teſt, ſo frequently mentioned in ſcripture, by which men prove to the world that they are believers in the name of Jeſus; and if any man imagine he is ſuch, while he is living in the known neglect of any of the divine commandments, he is plainly labouring under a moſt dangerous deluſion. Now, you muſt often have obſerved a melancholy inconſiſtency in the conduct of many profeſſing Chriſtians: you may have heard of ſome perhaps who are living in malice and envy;---of others who are chargeable with injuſtice in their dealings;---of others who are not unfrequently heard to take the name of God in vain. You may have heard of others, (perhaps you may have met with ſome of them), who can indulge at times in drunkenneſs; of others who can engage in obſcene converſation, who can contribute to ſupport the licentious joke, or retail, with apparent marks of ſatisfaction, the malignant ſtory, which is

calculated to turn vital godlineſs into ridicule. Perhaps you may be acquainted with ſome who are often unneceſſarily abſent from the houſe of prayer; with others who can ſpend the evening of the Lord's day in walking through the fields, or in idle and worldly converſation, while the duties of the family and of the cloſet are totally diſregarded. Nay, of ſome we have heard it inſinuated, that though they can venture to ſit down at the table of the Lord, they can even examine their books of accounts, and write letters of buſineſs, on that ſacred day, which the living God hath expreſsly appropriated for his own worſhip.

In many inſtances, theſe things perhaps cannot be completely aſcertained, and at any rate it is comparatively a ſmall thing to be judged of man's judgment. We cannot but pity the weakneſs of the man who can for a moment imagine, that a profeſſion of Chriſtianity can be of any avail while he is living in the violation of its precepts. But, alas! this conduct uſually ariſes from the total want of any ſerious reflection on the ſubject. If men are at all ignorant here, they are *willingly* ignorant. If they would examine the ſcriptures, they would eaſily diſcern the difference between a mere profeſſion of religion and the reality; and it ſurely requires but little reflection to diſcover that the Searcher of hearts cannot poſſibly be deceived.

But we are more apt to be ſtruck with the

commiſſion of what is forbidden than with the neglect of what is enjoined, without recollecting, that in both ways we may equally ſhew our diſregard of the authority of the living God. This ſuggeſts, my dear friend, another queſtion which I would alſo wiſh you ſeriouſly to propoſe to yourſelf. Am I living in the neglect of any duty which I know God requires of me in his word, or in the commiſſion of any thing which he forbids? --- --- --- --- --- --- --- --- --- ---
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As a parent, are you bringing up your children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord? Conſider now, if your children were to be removed from you at preſent by death, would you feel ſolid comfort in thinking that you had been endeavouring to improve the influence you have over them, by leading them to lay to heart the things that belong to their everlaſting peace? Are you accuſtomed to maintain the worſhip of God in your family *? You feel perhaps a con-

* Some, who will probably read theſe pages, will recollect, that I converſed with them in private reſpecting the importance of attending to this duty. Though they had formerly been neglecting it, they in general readily acknowledged their obligations to diſcharge it. Their own conſciences will now teſtify, whether, ſince that period, they have been accuſtomed to do ſo.

In calling men to the obſervance of this duty, I hope, I ſhall not be miſunderſtood, as if I ſuppoſed it could be diſcharged aright without a previous belief of the doctrines of

viction, that this is a proper way of expreſſing your obligations to him for all his goodneſs. You acknowledge that it is a duty; are you then diſcharging it? If we allow a thing to be right, and at the ſame time neglect it, our own hearts muſt condemn us; how much more He that is greater than our hearts, and knoweth all things! If your ſituation require the obſervance of other relative duties of domeſtic life, are you ſtudying, as in the ſight of God, faithfully to diſcharge them? and, in all your intercourſe with your neighbours around you, are you endeavouring to reduce to practice that admirable maxim of our bleſſed Lord, "Whatſoever ye would that men ſhould do unto you, do even ſo unto them?" Under a ſenſe of your own weakneſs, are you conſcious, that you are daily looking up to God in ſecret prayer, for the influences of his promiſed grace? and, while you do ſo, are you daily reading his word to know what he requires at your hands?

Theſe are ſome of the leading features of the Chriſtian character; and we can have no ſolid comfort, unleſs we are in ſome meaſure poſſeſſed of them. You will allow I think, my dear friend, that the ſubject is infinitely important; let me therefore earneſtly entreat of you to

the goſpel. But while they profeſs ſuch a belief, we may ſurely, with much propriety, aſk for the proof of their ſincerity from the effects it produces on the conduct.

conſider it when alone. I know well that when we ſpeak of theſe things from the pulpit, we are frequently conſidered as uſing merely the language of a profeſſion, and in this way what is ſtated has often little efficacy. I hope, however, you will receive what I have now ſuggeſted as the requeſt of a friend. I have often heard men at the hour of death deeply lamenting that they had ſo long delayed engaging in a ſerious examination of the foundation on which they were building their hopes for eternity. The great God has been the witneſs of our converſation. He ſees the motives from which I have ſpoken to you, and the ſpirit with which you have received it. I hope we may both have reaſon afterwards to bleſs his name for this opportunity of converſing on a ſubject ſo deeply intereſting to each of us. When we meet at laſt in the preſence of our great Judge, the reſult of this converſation will appear. If you have no objections, before we part we may join in prayer to God for his bleſſing upon it.

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May every bleſſing attend you! Farewell."

Thus, my dear friends, have I endeavoured to ſtate what I probably ſhould have ſuggeſted, had it been in my power to have enjoyed a perſonal converſation with you. I hope ſome may be diſpoſed to ſecond my intentions in thus

addreſſing you, by following out the deſign of this ſuppoſed interview. If ſo, permit me to point out how you may do it. Not by haſtily glancing over what I have written, and then laying it aſide, without ever reflecting on the important ſubject to which it relates. Wherever this ſhall be the caſe, you may conſider the object of my writing this letter as completely loſt. What uſe then would I have you to make of it? I would wiſh you to ſelect ſome portion of your time, when you are leaſt likely to be interrupted, and after you have entered into your cloſet, and ſhut your door, to pray to your Father in heaven, that he would make you faithful to yourſelves in a matter of everlaſting moment. I would then have you to read over what I have addreſſed to you; to pauſe at the queſtions as you go along; to aſk yourſelves, as in the ſight of God, what anſwer can I fairly give to theſe? You are ſurpriſed perhaps that I ſhould be ſo very minute in my requeſts, but I ſhall give you the reaſon of it. One very common deception, among many others, which men are accuſtomed to practiſe upon themſelves, is, that of perpetually delaying ſerious enquiry into their ſtate in the ſight of God. What we think we can do at any time, is apt to be left undone altogether. In order to guard againſt this, it is neceſſary to be particular. It is neceſſary to ſet apart a ſpecific time;---to mark, in ſo many words, the queſ-

tions we ſhould put to ourſelves; and as minutely to examine what anſwers can fairly be given to them, as we would wiſh to have done, if we heard a voice from heaven, ſaying, This night thy ſoul ſhall be required of thee!

Perhaps the following ſuppoſition may, in ſome meaſure, illuſtrate the very general (I might ſay almoſt univerſal) influence of this deception juſt mentioned. Let us imagine, that any of us were aſſured, that before another day dawn, we ſhould be called to give an account of our ſtewardſhip. What agitation would it not, in almoſt every caſe, produce? How many inſtances of duties, either careleſsly performed, or perhaps fooliſhly delayed in the expectation of ſome more convenient ſeaſon, would inſtantly ruſh into our minds? and in many inſtances, would not the recollection of ſins, either more open or more ſecret, which perhaps men had often intended to abandon, fill them with unutterable confuſion at ſo near a proſpect of the period of retribution. Let every individual, on the ſuppoſition that he had actually received ſuch a ſudden call into the inviſible world, conſider what would firſt occur to himſelf. Mark this well. It is probably the moſt defective part of your character. Let conſcience ſpeak. Liſten to it. Encourage it to repeat its remonſtrances, till you feel that you dare not trifle with them any longer, but are conſtrained practically to attend to its dictates.

In the above addreſs, you will eaſily ſee I have ſuppoſed a general caſe, as it would have been impoſſible, without extending it to an immoderate length, to accommodate it particularly, to all the various ſhades of character that are to be found in every large congregation. The perſon addreſſed is plainly ſuppoſed to profeſs himſelf a Chriſtian. I know there are ſome in the congregation who have never done this, at leaſt in the more common way of applying for admiſſion to the Lord's table. Though the number of ſuch is comparatively ſmall, I would here requeſt their attention to the few following obſervations.

Some of you, my dear friends, will recollect different converſations we formerly had upon this ſubject. You will bear me witneſs, that I never expreſſed any deſire that you ſhould make a profeſſion of Chriſtianity, unleſs you really believe that its origin is divine. This would make you hypocrites, but nothing elſe. But I would entreat of you to weigh well the conſequences of your preſent conduct. I know ſome of you are diſpoſed to plead here, that you find many who make a profeſſion of Chriſtianity as regardleſs of its precepts as thoſe who do not. Along with this, you are apt to ſuppoſe that there is a peculiar circumſpection of conduct incumbent on the former which is not equally required of the latter; and that conſequently your criminality is leſs, if you ſhould

fall into ſin, while you make no ſuch pretenſions to the Chriſtian character. Let us examine this apology a little.

It has already been allowed, there are many who give too good evidence from their lives, that, though they profeſs the religion of Jeſus, they are totally unacquainted with its practical influence. It is cheerfully admitted, that nothing can be more fooliſh than ſuch a profeſſion, and that it would be much better if ſuch men did not make it at all. But why would it be better? Is it becauſe their ſituation more certainly entails upon them the divine diſpleaſure at laſt, if they live and die in it, than if they openly rejected the grace of the goſpel? No! The dreadful conſequences of both are equally certain. Thoſe men indeed who can wait on the more ſolemn ordinances of Chriſtianity, while at the ſame time they live in ſin, ſeem peculiarly chargeable with pouring contempt on Him by whom theſe ordinances were inſtituted: but the principal point of view in which their abſtaining from ſuch a profeſſion appears rather deſirable, is, becauſe there might then perhaps be a greater probability of their diſcovering their danger before it was too late.

Here I readily acknowledge, there are ſome in the congregation who partake of theſe ordinances, who, unleſs a change has taken place on their characters, I think ought not to be allowed to do ſo. In making this remark, I mean

to blame no individual, nor claſs of men who may be engaged in the adminiſtration of the diſcipline of the church; others, I truſt, act according to their views of duty, I ſimply uſe the privilege of ſtating mine. If any individual be living in the known violation either of thoſe diſpoſitions which the goſpel requires, or of the precepts it enjoins; I am convinced, they ought not to be permitted to partake of its peculiar privileges. They are plainly living under the influence of the moſt dangerous deluſion, and their admiſſion to the participation of theſe, has the ſtrongeſt tendency to foſter it. I the rather introduce this ſubject, to expreſs my unfeigned regret, if, during my miniſtry among you, by countenancing any of ſuch a deſcription, in making this profeſſion, I contributed my ſhare to lead them to falſe views of their character. I conſider this acknowledgment as a duty I owe, not only to them, but to all who may have been ſtumbled at ſuch being allowed to partake of theſe ſacred ordinances. I would now willingly repair any injury they may have received from this quarter, and my fairly ſtating my preſent ſentiments on this ſubject, is the only way in which it is now in my power to do ſo *. Such in-

* I know well, there is a material difference between experiencing difficulties in the diſcharge of duty, from the particular ſituation in which we may be placed, and clearly ſeeing our obligations to abandon it. On this account, we ought certainly to judge with much lenity of all thoſe who, we have

conſiſtent profeſſors will not, I hope, conſider me their enemy becauſe I thus write. Some of them will recollect, that while reſiding among

reaſon to believe, are acting conſcientiouſly, though their views of duty may in ſome points differ from our own. I know there are many in the eſtabliſhed church who frequently experience much uneaſineſs from the very promiſcuous manner in which the ordinances of the goſpel are adminiſtered in it, and I have no heſitation in ſaying, it was one of the principal inducements which led me to relinquiſh my connection with it. While I feel myſelf conſtrained to love and eſteem many godly miniſters and eminent private Chriſtians, who ſtill ſee it their duty to countenance ſuch a promiſcuous communion, while in many reſpects I ſincerely wiſh I could more cloſely imitate their example, it is much to be feared, that this part of their conduct injures the cauſe which I know they wiſh to promote. I deeply lament the loſs to the world of that luminous diſplay of the efficacy of Chriſtian principles which I know ſuch men would exhibit, were they permitted, in their public meaſures, as well as in their private conduct, to act agreeably to their own views of duty, inſtead of being ſubjected to the authority of men of a totally oppoſite character. Their preſent ſituation is certainly calculated to deſtroy, or at leaſt to prevent from appearing, that diſtinction which ought invariably to be ſeen between the members of the church of Chriſt and the world. In this way it tends to obliterate one of the moſt ſtriking evidences of the divine origin and excellence of our holy religion, that which conſiſts in the peculiar union in principle, and the mutual affection, which ſhould diſtinguiſh thoſe who profeſs to embrace it. Beſides, as there is in human nature, a ſtrong propenſity to ſelf-deception, by entertaining falſe views of our own character, it ſhould be one great object which Chriſtians ought to have in view in their intercourſe with the world around them, and the miniſters of Chriſt, in the diſcharge of their

you, I ſtated to them in private the inconſiſtency of their conduct, and how vain it was to hope that a mere profeſſion could be found at laſt of any avail. I am not conſcious that my deſire to promote their beſt intereſts is in any meaſure diminiſhed. I ſhould rejoice to hear that they were walking in the truth, and it is in the diſcharge of the moſt important office of friendſhip, that I would again moſt ſeriouſly warn them

miniſterial duty, to do what in them lies to counteract it. If even in converſation a Chriſtian ſhould expreſs a ſentiment which tended to make a man entertain a favourable view of his ſtate, if there was good reaſon to think he was a ſtranger to the influence of Divine grace, it ought, from its hurtful tendency, to be a ſubject of ſerious regret and of future watchfulneſs. But how much greater is the injury we are apt to do a man, if, by a great public act, we ſolemnly acknowledge him as a Chriſtian brother, while, by the teſt by which Jeſus requires us to judge of men, "by their fruits," we have the fulleſt evidence, that he has not yet believed to the ſaving of the ſoul.

I have often been aſked, if I expect a perfectly pure communion on earth? I have no heſitation in ſaying, I do not. It will be allowed, however, there is a material difference between hypocrites being found in a church, who, for a ſeaſon, wear the maſk of religion, and perſons being retained in communion who are living in habits plainly incompatible with the Chriſtian character. In the former caſe, no blame attaches to the members of a church, if, upon diſcovery, ſuch perſons are excluded; for we are never called to ſearch the heart. In the latter, the caſe is materially different, if, in the word of God, certain characters are deſcribed, which a church of Chriſt is expreſsly required to exclude from its ſociety. See 1 Cor. ch. v. 2 Cor. vi. 14. 2 Tim. iii. 5.

of their danger if they be ſtill reſting in a form of godlineſs while they continue ſtrangers to its power. Alas! the time is ſhort. The deluſion under which they labour is of the moſt fatal tendency, and if it be not diſpelled before they die, they muſt feel its dreadful conſequences for ever.

But how will the inconſiſtency that appears in their character plead an excuſe for you who are living in the more avowed rejection of the inſtitutions of Chriſt? Their guilt and folly, though differing a little in kind, will ſurely be no extenuation of yours. To his own maſter every one ſtands or falls. I would here requeſt your attention to an important diſtinction on this ſubject. Though a man's profeſſing to be a Chriſtian is no proof that he is one; his making no profeſſion is a pretty deciſive proof that he is not. But you imagine perhaps there is a ſort of comparative innocence in your violation of the precepts of the goſpel, while you make no pretenſions to the Chriſtian character. Wherever men act on this principle, it implies a ſecret determination to diſregard theſe precepts; and as this cannot fail to ruin the ſoul, it is ſurely not worth while diſputing about the comparative criminality of two different ways of accompliſhing this dreadful end. The ſuppoſition, however, of this comparative innocence implies a moſt dangerous miſtake. Your conduct may not indeed be ſo manifeſtly inconſiſtent as that of merely no-

minal Chriſtians: but the deep guilt of both is equally incontrovertible. The ſame goſpel is preached to you that is preached to them. It is the commandment of God, that you ſhould believe on his Son from heaven, that you ſhould make a profeſſion of this belief, and that you ſhould be both ſincere and conſiſtent in doing ſo. In the word of God this commandment is equally addreſſed to all, and it is at his own peril that any individual diſregards it. While then we have this ſacred book in our hands, and while it thus explicitly reveals our duty in all its extent, both the external ſervice required of us, and the ſpirit with which it ought to be diſcharged, our ciminality is equally apparent, whether we continue ignorant of it, or neglect it when known.

I have hitherto ſuppoſed that thoſe of the congregation, who, though they might frequently attend public worſhip, had never aſked admiſſion to the table of the Lord, abſtained from ſuch a public profeſſion of religion, either from a total careleſſneſs about futurity, or from a life of ſin, rather than from avowed infidelity. I know, at leaſt there were ſome of this deſcription among you, who would have conſidered themſelves not a little injured, had it been at all inſinuated that they directly called in queſtion the truth of Chriſtianity. If there are any who have been led away by the infidel principles of the age, I cannot ſuppoſe they would

pay much attention to any thing that I could addreſs to them. Although they may not perceive it, their not profeſſing Chriſtianity ariſes from the ſame cauſes I have juſt alluded to, as producing this effect on others. It has been juſtly obſerved by a late elegant writer, that infidelity is more a diſeaſe of the heart, than of the head. It is not for want of evidence that men are infidels. It is not becauſe the light does not ſhine, but becauſe they hate the light, and will not come to it; and they hate it, becauſe their deeds are reproved by it. If men pretend to be infidels, and will not examine the evidence of Chriſtianity, they are plainly both criminal and fooliſh. Any man who has candidly examined that evidence knows its ſtrength. He knows, that if a man had the ſame evidence to regulate his conduct in the moſt important purſuits of the preſent life, he would not only without heſitation riſque his all upon it, but would univerſally be conſidered as a fool if he did not. This conſideration unqueſtionably eſtabliſhes the guilt of all thoſe who reject the goſpel. The evidence on which men invariably act in the concerns of the preſent world, will pronounce the condemnation of thoſe at laſt, who only reject it when it is brought in ſupport of the revealed will of God.

But does not the profeſſion of infidelity often ariſe from men never thinking ſeriouſly about futurity at all? What folly does this diſcover!

and how inconſiſtent is it with the proper exerciſe of our faculties as rational creatures! In the memoirs of the late Dr Samuel Johnſon, we find different expreſſions which he uſed on this ſubject in converſation with his friends, ſome of which, as they are much in point here, I ſhall take the liberty of quoting. I mention the name of this great man, not becauſe I think Chriſtianity really ſtands in need of great names, but becauſe he expreſſed what I apprehend to be the truth upon this ſubject, with that peculiar energy by which he was ſo much diſtinguiſhed, while at the ſame time it is well known, that his uncommon vigour of mind ſtands univerſally unqueſtioned, and I may almoſt ſay, unrivalled. "Mr Boſwell having one day aſked if Foote was an infidel? 'Yes, Sir,' replied Johnſon, 'Foote was an infidel, as a dog is an infidel; he never ſeriouſly thought on the ſubject.' *Boſwell.* 'Foote, Sir, told me, when he was ill he was not afraid to die.' *Johnſon.* 'It is not true, Sir, hold a piſtol to Foote's breaſt, or to Hume's breaſt, and threaten to kill them, you will ſee how they behave.' Again, Mr B. having one day told the Doctor, that Hume had ſaid to him, he felt no greater uneaſineſs in thinking that he ſhould *not be* after this life, than that he had *not been* before he began to exiſt. Johnſon replied, 'Sir, if he really thinks ſo, his perceptions are diſturbed, he is mad; if he does not think ſo, he lies. He may tell you, he holds his finger in the flame

of a candle without feeling pain, would you believe him? when he dies, he at leaſt gives up all he has." It ſeems to me almoſt impoſſible, that a man ſhould get ſo confirmed in infidelity, as to be proof againſt an occaſional ſuſpicion at leaſt, Peradventure I may be wrong; and if, even this ſhould occaſionally ſhoot acroſs his mind, when we conſider the ineffable magnitude of the riſque, unleſs he can ſucceed in completely drowning ſerious thought, it muſt ruin his peace. It is deeply to be lamented, that any ſhould be ſo blind to their own intereſt, as to adopt a ſyſtem ſo ſubverſive of preſent comfort, as well as of future hope. We pray that they may be brought to a better mind. We would remind them, in the plain but emphatic language of ſcripture, which is addreſſed to the common ſenſe of all who will conſider it, "What ſhall it profit a man, if he ſhall gain the whole world, and loſe his own ſoul? If thou be wiſe, thou ſhalt be wiſe for thyſelf; but if thou ſcorneſt, thou alone ſhalt bear it *."

* I would here particularly recommend to the attention of the young people of the congregation a late excellent work of Mr Fuller's of Kettering, entitled, *The Goſpel its own Witneſs*. The intrinſic force of the arguments there brought forward, together with the very happy manner in which they are ſtated and addreſſed to the common ſenſe of mankind, furniſh a freſh proof, if any can read ſuch a work without being convinced by it, that mens oppoſition to the goſpel ariſes from ſomething in the human heart which mere ſtrength of reaſoning cannot overcome.

I have now, my dear friends, nearly finiſhed what I propoſed in writing you. No one, I hope, will be ſurpriſed at my thus addreſſing you, or ſuppoſe I am ſtepping out of my way in ſuggeſting theſe friendly hints, though I am no longer your paſtor. It may naturally be ſuppoſed, that I ſhould feel a peculiar intereſt in the congregation at Stirling, after being ſo intimately connected with it for nearly ſix years. It is true, this connection is now diſſolved; but it ſurely ſuggeſts a ſubject of ſerious reflection to us all, that the conſequences of it are to exiſt for ever. I believe, at every period of our lives, when we look back to that which is paſt, we ſhall feel much cauſe of deep humiliation in the preſence of God, if not for the total omiſſion of duty, at leaſt for the want of that degree of zeal and activity in the diſcharge of it, which we ought to have experienced. When we think of the infinite importance of eternity, every hour, every converſation ought to be improved in the proſpect of its approach. In this point of view, we have perhaps all reaſon to regret that we were not more ſolicitous to improve our intercourſe for our mutual benefit while it continued. But let us all ſtudy now to derive ſome improvement from the recollection of the period we ſpent together. Many of you, I hope, are convinced that I did not willingly conceal from you any part of the counſel of God; that while I warned ſinners of their danger, it was from a ſettled conviction that they were indeed

expoſed to the wrath to come; that while I endeavoured to diſplay to you the divine dignity and excellence of the heavenly Saviour, it was from a real perſuaſion of his unlimited ability to ſave; that when I attempted to point out the neceſſity of regeneration, and of that holineſs of character by which it is expreſſed, it was from a firm belief, that without holineſs no man can ſee the Lord. It becomes us all frequently to look forward then, with the deepeſt ſerioufneſs, to that eventful period, when we ſhall meet again, when we ſhall ſtand together before our common Judge. It will then appear with what principles we have ſpoken and heard the word of life; whether we have lived and died in the belief of the truths which it reveals; whether, in ſhort, the goſpel has been to us the ſavour of life unto life, or of death unto death. Let us all often ponder this in our hearts, and may God grant that our future meeting may be full of heavenly conſolation to us all!

It gives me much pleaſure to think that my place among you has been ſupplied by a faithful miniſter of Jeſus Chriſt, whoſe labours I hope will be more uſeful among you than I fear mine have been. I earneſtly pray, that he, as well as my late worthy colleague, may have much comfort and ſucceſs in their miniſtrations. I need hardly remind you of your privilege in enjoying ſuch a miniſtry. I truſt moſt of you are ſenſible of it. I hope you will eſteem your paſtors very highly in love for their works

ſake, and that they will long be ſpared for a bleſſing among you.

I am happy it has been in my power to make this ſmall additional attempt to be in ſome meaſure uſeful to you. Let us join in imploring, that God would accompany it with his bleſſing; and if he ſhall be pleaſed, in any inſtance, to do ſo, let us cordially unite in giving him the glory. We are living in a world of much uncertainty. This may be the laſt opportunity I may have of addreſſing you; and though I ſhould be ſpared occaſionally to viſit you, many who read theſe pages may, before that time, be removed into the world of ſpirits. This has already, you know, been the caſe with ſeveral ſince I left you. I could name different individuals who uſed to worſhip with us, and who probably were preſent laſt time I addreſſed you from the pulpit, whoſe bodies you have ſince that time laid in the grave, while their ſpirits have returned to God who gave them. Theſe are ſolemn remembrancers. They addreſs us from the dead. Their language is, Prepare thou alſo to meet thy God. May the Lord abundantly bleſs you all. I am, my dear friends, with beſt wiſhes for your temporal and eternal happineſs, your late Paſtor,

Dundee,
Oct. 16. 1800.

William Innes.

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